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FY2017-2018

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Los Alamos National Laboratory

Ombuds Office Biennial Report

FY2017 - 2018

CONFIDENTIAL
INFORMAL
NEUTRAL
INDEPENDENT





LANL Ombuds Office Report FY17-18

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INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

Visitors contact the Ombuds Office to obtain coaching, explore options, develop strategies, learn about LANL resources, understand formal processes and policies, or request a facilitated discussion/mediation. The number of visitors who contacted the office in FY17 and FY18 was 540 and 555, respectively - the highest annual numbers since FY08.

The Ombuds Office supports professional workplace communication and conflict management skills through individual consultations, presentations, the resource library, and special events. Courses are regularly scheduled and available to the LANL workforce. Annually, an average of ~1950 participants attended Ombuds courses, workshops, and talks in FY17-18. The total number of individuals who attended presentations in FY17-18, both internal and external to LANL, was 4005. Staff continue to present annually at the International Ombudsman Association Conferences and New Mexico Alternative Dispute Resolution Symposiums. In this reporting period, the Laboratory Ombudsman was recruited to present communication and negotiation skills courses for several universities and prestigious national science and engineering organizations.

The mission of the Ombuds Office is to enhance communication and mitigate conflict. Staff provide expertise, feedback and resources to employees, leaders and organizations in order to strengthen conflict and communication capabilities. A related function of the office is to identify and report trends, without breaching confidentiality or anonymity. Trends and concerns may be raised around policies and procedures - including potential future issues – or concerning unhealthy patterns within an organization.

The underpinnings of Organizational Ombuds work at LANL are provided by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Standards of Practice, (IOA Standards of Practice, 2009; Code of Ethics, 2007). The four IOA tenets are neutrality/impartiality, independence, confidentiality and informality. [Web links to the IOA standards can be found in the Appendix, pg.15].

FY17-18 Highlights

New Presentations

Beyond Appreciation
½ day Training for HR professionals
Negotiations and Influence
Two-day Crucial Conversations

New collaborations and outreach

Active Bystanders Working Group
Booth at Student and Mentor Picnic
Healthy Culture Platform
Mental Wellbeing Expo
WSST “Stress and You” Event

Presentations to national organizations

American Physics Society
California State University
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Workshops by external speakers

Dignity in the Workplace
Meeting Facilitation Basics
Neuroscience and Leadership

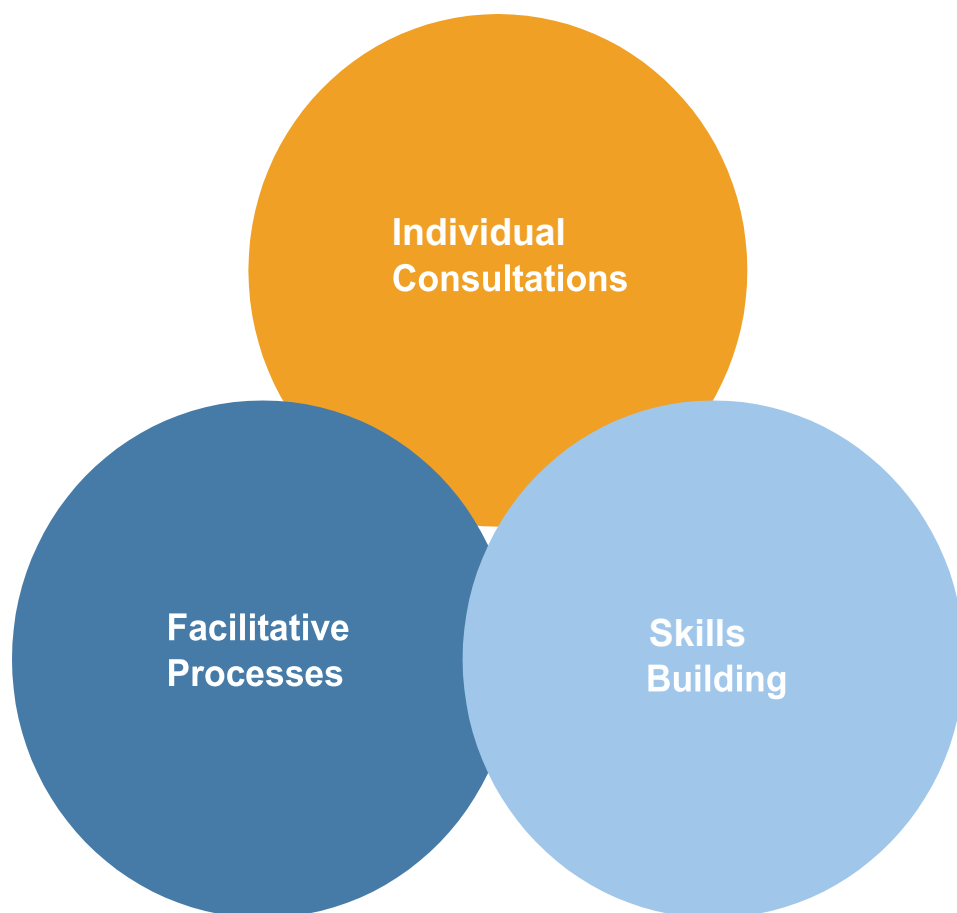
Dignity in the Workplace

Ombuds hosted a talk on 'Dignity in the Workplace' given by guest speaker, Dr. Donna Hicks, an internationally renowned expert on dignity and conflict resolution. Hicks spoke at the National Security Sciences Building on March 6, 2018, with over 300 employees in attendance. Workshops for LANL managers and employees were held the previous day. The talk and workshops explored the '10 Elements and Violations of Dignity' based on Hicks' book [Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict](#). Hicks' presentation is available on the LANL ViewIt system. The office also collaborated with the Health and Safety Activities Working Group to give copies of the book to the first 200 employees who attended the talk.

OMBUDS SERVICES

Overview of Services

Ombuds services can be categorized into three areas: individual consultations, facilitative processes and skills building approaches.



Collaborations

Lab-wide collaborations for FY17-18 included the volunteer-led Active Bystander Working group, which focuses on creating a 'speak up' culture, and the Healthy Culture Platform (HCP), which focuses on connecting programs that promote safety, security, wellbeing, civility, respect and dignity at LANL. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Program (MHWP) has grown to include a dedicated resource page, brown bags and presentations, Mental Health First Aid courses, and the first annual Mental Health Expo. Staff attended Student Programs Advisory Committee (SPAC) meetings and staffed an Ombuds booth at the student-mentor picnic. Ombuds offers points to employees attending courses through the Health and Safety Activities Working Group and Virgin Pulse program. Staff also supported the DIR-WSST, staffing WSST fairs and coordinating a "Stress and You" event with EAP.

Individual Consultations

The number of visitors seen annually has continued to increase since 2015. Individual consultations averaged 547 in FY17-18. Visitors contact the office to schedule an in-person appointment or to speak to someone on the phone regarding their workplace related issue in confidence and informally. Office staff:

- Provide a safe place to engage in confidential, informal conversations
- Coach and assist in reframing challenges and evaluating options
- Offer neutral, informal mediation and facilitation between parties in conflict
- Help visitors explore options and refer to appropriate Laboratory resources and policies

Professional Skills Building

Skills development opportunities offered by the Ombuds Office include presentations, a resource library, Web-based articles and videos, and workshops given by external trainers. Presentations are scheduled regularly in UTrain. Ombuds currently offers 19 presentations, with four new courses piloted in FY17-18. Organizational and site-specific communication skills workshops are scheduled on request, as are external presentations.

A total of 4005 individuals attended skills building courses, workshops and talks in FY17-18 combined, including employees who attended the Hick's talk as well as non-LANL participants at workshops presented to external organizations. The Ombuds Office continues to train on Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), with 271 employees and a few members of the community trained in FY17-18. 450 participants have completed the course at LANL since 2015. The Ombuds Resource Library continues to be expanded. 238 visitors borrowed content from the library in FY17 and FY18, similar to FY15-16, when 232 checked out books. [Web links to presentation list, self-help pamphlets and the resource library are available under Ombuds Office Materials in the Appendix, page 15].

Facilitative Processes

Ombuds offers structured mediation and informal facilitation between parties conflict. There were a total of 24 facilitations and mediations in FY17-18. After conducting an assessment of mediation usage rates and interviewing LANL volunteer mediators during 2016, the volunteer mediation program (established in 1997) was disbanded in FY17. While 'shuttle diplomacy' is not tracked, it is a hybrid of consultation and facilitation during which the Ombuds staff may shuttle back and forth among parties in conflict who are unable to talk directly to each other.

Technology Partnerships/ Business Concerns

The Technology Partnerships Ombuds (formerly known as Technology Transfer Ombuds) is the dispute resolution mechanism for the Laboratory's small business, and licensing/patent partners as per DOE mandate. Such concerns are most often referred to the appropriate office within LANL, or shuttle diplomacy or mediation may be provided. There were seven business concerns and no Technology Transfer concerns in FY17-18.

2017 Ombuds Survey

Summary of Survey Results

An anonymous, voluntary, 10-point Ombuds Office Service and Course Evaluation questionnaire was distributed during Ombuds courses in June - August, 2017. Qualtrics survey software was used to evaluate the data. Of the 194 survey respondents, 42% did not have a clear understanding of Ombuds services and another 12% lacked any awareness of such services. 36% were aware of Ombuds services and felt they had a clear understanding of those services. The majority of participants had never visited the Ombuds Office webpage (68%), used any Ombuds services (79%) nor taken previous Ombuds courses (59%).

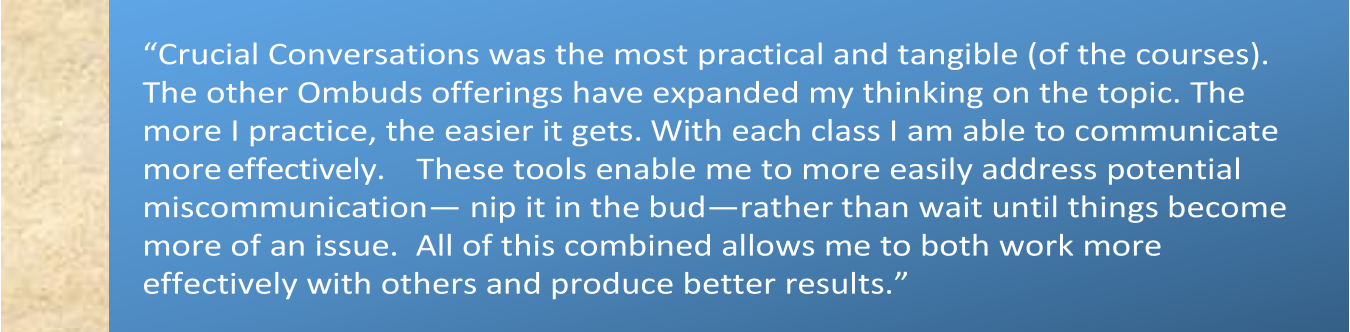
Most participants reported that they would take other Ombuds courses, with more than half stating they would “absolutely” take another class, and 35% stating they would “likely” take another class. Out of all of the services that LANL Ombuds offers, the least known options were ‘resource library’, ‘exploring and clarifying options’ and ‘referring to other programs and policy’. The most known services are the ‘presentations on conflict and communication skills’ and ‘facilitating discussions/mediation’.

Due to the relatively small percentage of employees who voluntarily choose to attend courses and the small survey sample gathered over seven weeks of Ombuds courses, the results of the data may not be representative of the general Laboratory population. The survey results are nonetheless a good data point for assessing the knowledge of the Ombuds Office at LANL and a basis for recommendations moving forward.

[See the full report, *Service Evaluation Report Summer 2017*, Attachment, pg.16]

Course Survey Testimonials

“Ombuds classes take the soft, squooshy side of human interactions and give them a structure—make it clearer on how to get unstuck, and move conversations forward. They are fun, enjoyable and helpful. The classes are a nice break from the day and you leave with practical tools. I took part in a class that was all group leaders from my division and it was a powerful experience! The participatory nature of the learning was fantastic! Having a common communication language allows you to address the miscommunications earlier and with ease. It prevents a lot of conflict down the road. I’ve notice that it decreases the time I worry and fret about interactions. This frees up a lot of my emotional energy, which I can then put into my work.”



“Crucial Conversations was the most practical and tangible (of the courses). The other Ombuds offerings have expanded my thinking on the topic. The more I practice, the easier it gets. With each class I am able to communicate more effectively. These tools enable me to more easily address potential miscommunication—nip it in the bud—rather than wait until things become more of an issue. All of this combined allows me to both work more effectively with others and produce better results.”

Survey Conclusions

The annual number of visitors correlates to ~5% of LANL workers. Courses account for an additional 1950 employees who are reached annually. Based on the survey results indicating that 58% of employees did not know about or were unclear about services, a majority of employees may be unaware of the resources offered by Ombuds. While some LANL employees may know about Ombuds services and may simply not feel the need to use the office, there is still a potentially large number of LANL employees not benefitting from conflict resolution services.

Reasons for not using Ombuds services may include not knowing the Ombuds Office exists, lack of understanding of the scope and type of services provided, and/or poor institutional memory about Ombuds services. Using Ombuds is voluntary and not part of formal policies or procedures, so the office may be ‘out of sight and out of mind’. An ongoing challenge has been to consistently inform LANL employees about Ombuds. Venues have included the new hire orientation process and events surrounding National Conflict Resolution Day. Recommendations made by the student employee who conducted the 2017 survey include continually looking at ways to refocus, rebrand and remind LANL employees about the unique resource available to them.

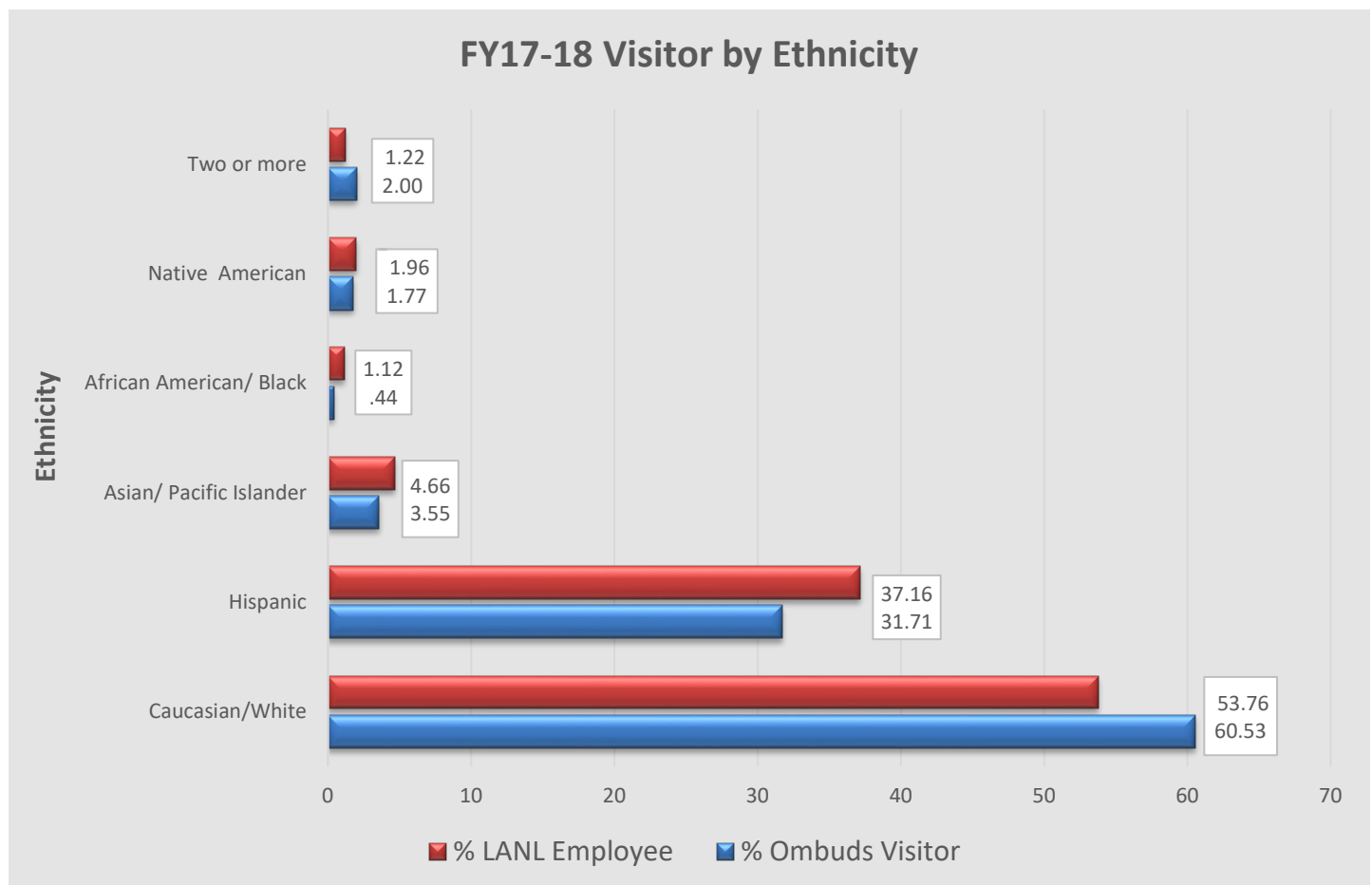
An information poster was designed, published and sent to all group offices and posted around the Laboratory in January 2018. The poster announces not only the presence of the Ombuds Office—including the physical location of the Office and contact information—but offers general information about what the Ombuds Office does and does not do for those unfamiliar with the services offered. The Ombuds Office also provides informational tools and resources on its webpage and has produced several informational tri-fold brochures, including a general Ombuds Office brochure and a MHFA brochure. [Web links to brochures are located in the Appendix, pg. 15]

Information about the Ombuds Office was previously included in New Hire orientations through April 2017, when there was a significant overhaul in the onboarding process. In order to get the information to new hires, information about the office is emailed through the new hire distribution approximately 2-4 weeks after hire. Since 2016, the Ombuds Office has organized and marketed Conflict Resolution Day events in order to remind employees of Ombuds services. This effort has since expanded to include an entire month of special events and offerings.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND USAGE STATISTICS

Visitor Ethnicity

The Ombuds Office tracks visitor ethnicity based on six ethnic identities. Non-Hispanic Caucasian/White employees have historically visited the office at higher rates as a whole. This continued to be the case in FY17-18, although the overall percentage of visitors who identified as Caucasian/White decreased (60%) compared to FY15-16, when more than 68% of visitors to the Ombuds Office identified as Caucasian/White. There was an increase in the percentage of Hispanic individuals who visited the Ombuds Office, from 23% in FY15-16 to 31.71% in FY17-18.



Job Classification

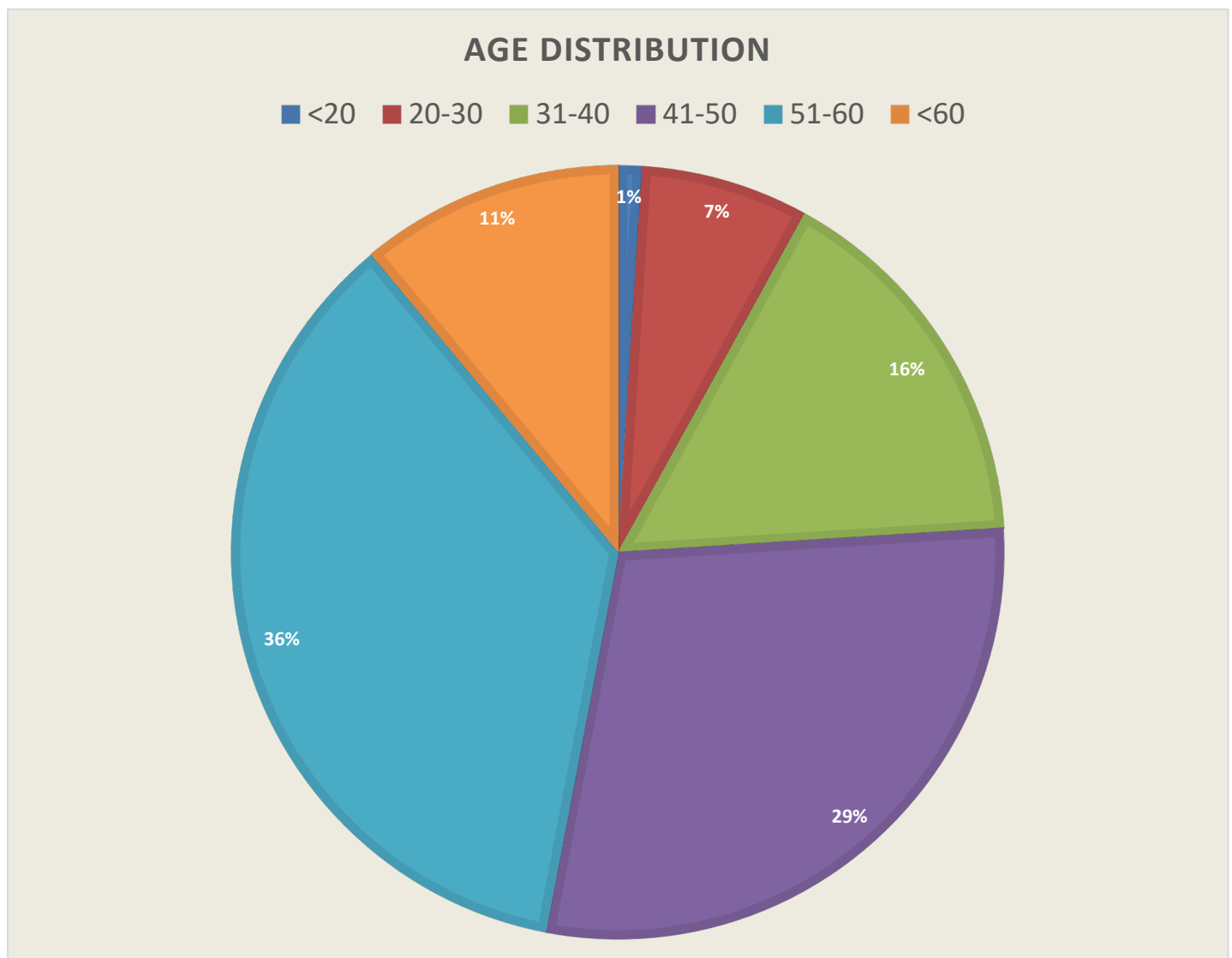
Managers have consistently used Ombuds more relative to non-managers. More managers are males and as in past years, more male managers (127) visited the office than females (113) in FY17-18. Professionals have a higher usage rate - compared to their population in the workforce - than technical, craft, students, post docs and others.

Gender Distribution

Women made up 57% of Ombuds visitors during FY17-18, similar to FY16-17 (58%), and 43% of those who used the Ombuds Office during this reporting period were male. This is counter to Laboratory workforce statistics, where men make up slightly more than two-thirds of the total, but consistent with nationwide data showing that women seek counseling and similar services more frequently than men.

Age Distribution

There was no change in the age distribution of Ombuds visitors in FY17-18. Younger workers are much less likely to visit the Ombuds Office.

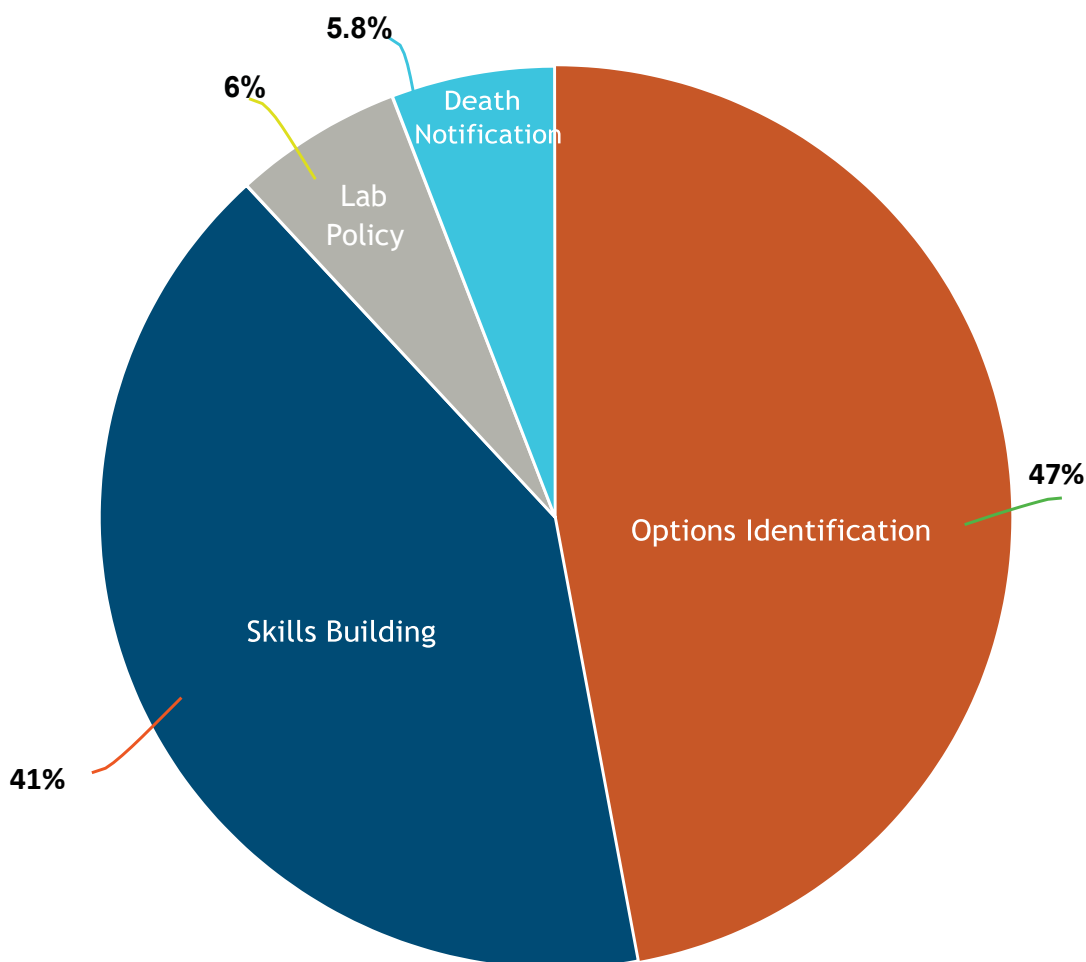


ISSUE CATEGORIES AND ACTIONS

Information/Assistance

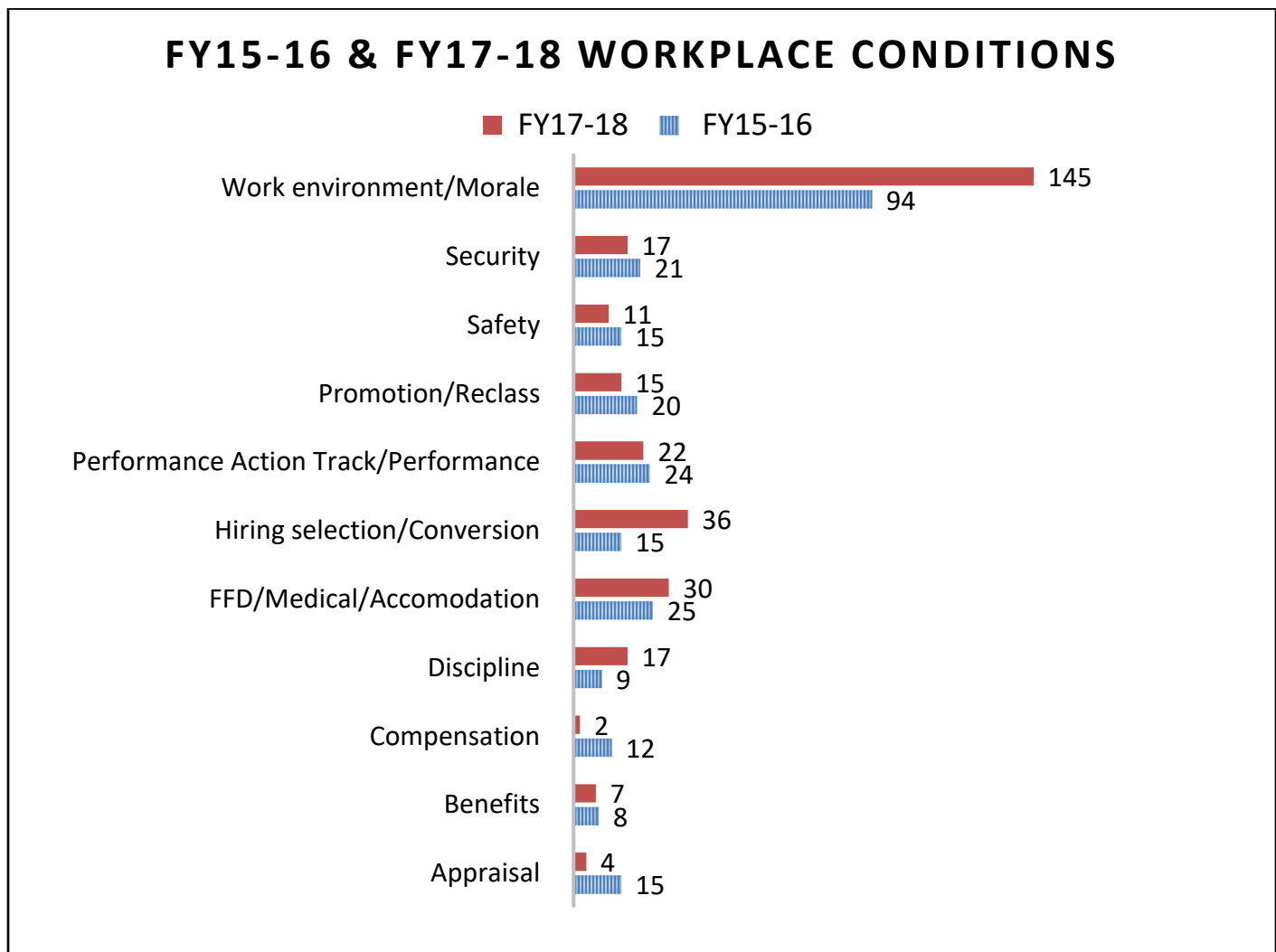
Under the information/assistance category, ‘options identification’ was the most frequently used subcategory. These include cases where staff inform visitors of resources – including formal processes – available for resolving their issues and support them in selecting which options to pursue. A close second is ‘skills building’, which refers to Ombuds presentations and resources from the library. The Ombuds Office continues to develop skills building courses and add to the resource library every year. The number of visitors requesting help identifying appropriate Lab policy remained the same in FY17-18 at 6% (5.5% in FY15- 16). Death notification assistance slightly decreased from 8% to just under 6%; this refers to Ombuds’ role under the Director-issued “Manager Guidelines for Handling Death or Significant Injury/Illness of a Colleague or Colleague’s Immediate Family Member”. Staff often provide more than one mode of assistance to visitors.

FY17-18 Type of Information/Assistance



Job Conditions

'Job conditions' are not always tracked, depending on the type of visitor assistance provided. The majority of employee issues continue to be classified under "Work Environment / Morale," a category that can also refer to interpersonal workplace conflict or perceived workplace dysfunction. There was an increase in the number of visitors reporting work morale issues, from 94 in FY15-16 to 145 in FY17-18, a trend which began prior to FY15. This increase may be connected to ombuds staff tracking these issues more closely and employees examining the 'respectful workplace' policy implemented in 2018. Issues concerning appraisals continue to drop, from 15 (FY15-16) to 4 (FY17-18). The number of issues related to hiring and conversion significantly increased, from a total of 15 (FY15-16) to 36 (FY17-18). Compensation issues also increased, from just (FY15-16) to 12 (FY17-18). These trends may relate to 2018 policy changes that did not allow an internal employee to be hired into to a new position unless the hiring manager negotiated a transition plan with the 'losing' manager. A policy change in 2016 enabled managers to extend the 12-month probationary period, which may also be associated with increased 'hiring and conversion' and 'compensation' issues reported.



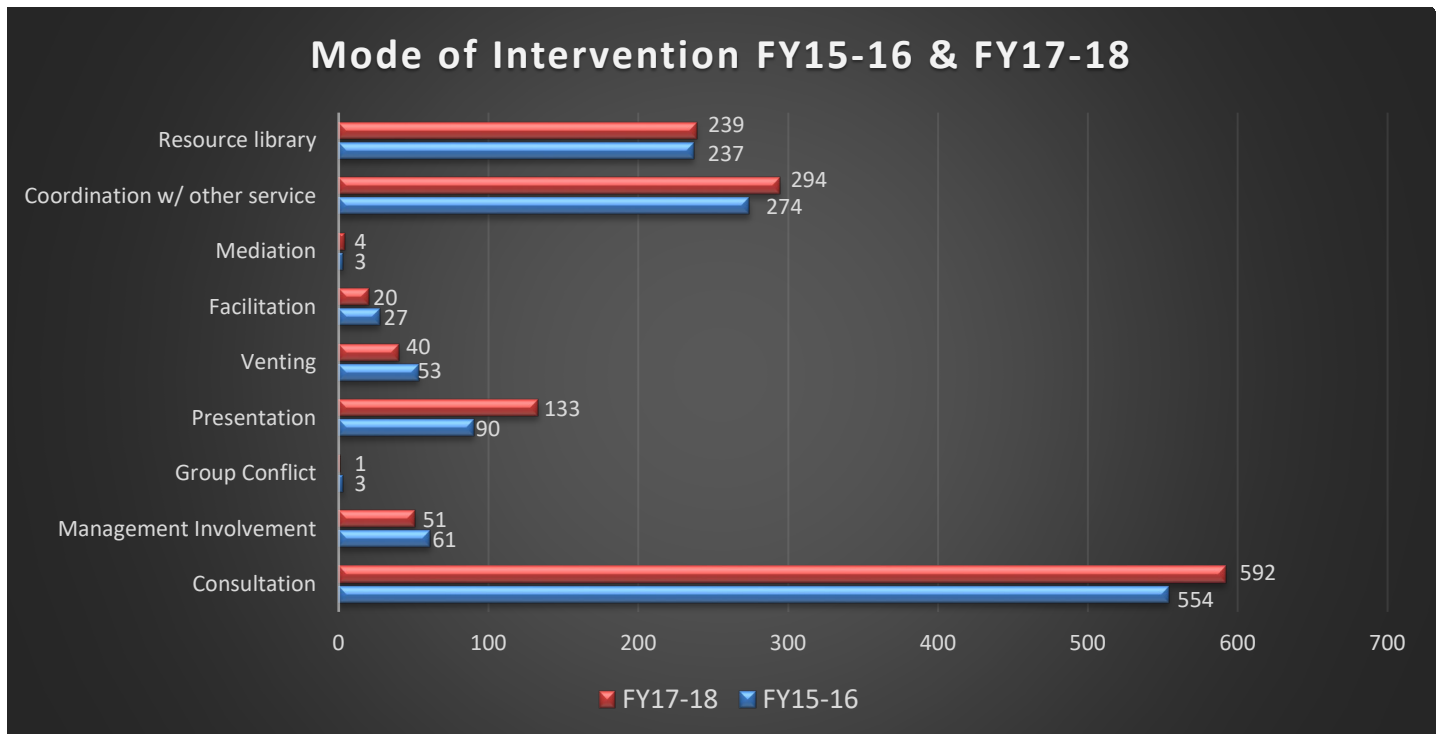
Interpersonal Conflict

When visitors report interpersonal conflict, they are historically more likely to report conflict with their supervisors rather than with peers. This remained true in FY17-18, with 40% of all interpersonal conflict being with a supervisor, 29% with a peer, 8% with a subordinate, and 22% between subordinates. These align with prior years, except for issues with subordinates, which were reported at a slightly lower rate in FY17-18 when compared to FY15-16, 8% versus 12%.

The number of interpersonal conflicts reported by males versus females are different. Only 22% of males versus 78% of females report interpersonal issues when visiting the Ombuds Office. Another difference is that males had a higher number of interpersonal issues ‘with subordinate’ and ‘between subordinates’ when compared to females. This is not surprising given the fact that a higher percentage of management positions are held by males.

Action and Intervention Modes

‘Modes of intervention’ are categories for identifying what specific actions Ombuds staff take while visitors are engaged with the office. More than one mode may be used for each case, which include: consultation/coaching, facilitation, mediation, management involvement, group conflict, coordination with another employee services, presentation, resource library, or venting. Consultation/coaching has always accounted for the mode most often used, with an average of 54% of all visitor cases in FY17-18. This is followed by referral to another employee service (27%) and use of the resource library (22%). 133 visitors requested presentations in FY17-18 versus 90 in FY15-16, which is a significant increase of 32.5%.

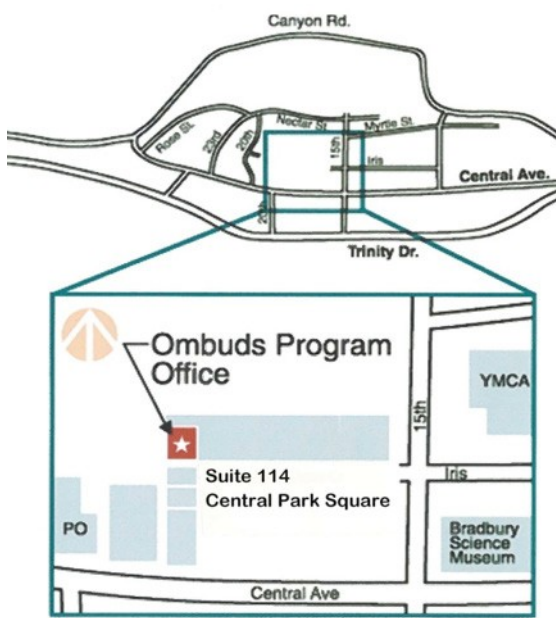




CONCLUSION

While small, the Ombuds Office provides valuable conflict mitigation and communication skills building services to the Laboratory workforce. It is a safe, neutral and confidential place for all those seeking the least escalating, most relationship building approaches to resolve workplace issues. Through consultations, coaching, communication skills courses, workshops, special events, and facilitative processes, the Ombuds Office consistently supports and improves the conflict capability and interpersonal relationships of the Lab workforce.

Contact Information



*The Ombuds Office is located at
114 Central Park Square,
in downtown Los Alamos.*

Phone: (505)665-2837

Anonymous Help Line: (505) 667-9370

Fax: (505) 667-9370

E-mail: ombuds@lanl.gov

Internal Web: <http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/index.shtml>

External Web: www.lanl.gov/resources/ombuds

Ombuds Staff:

Mary Beth Stevens, Laboratory Ombudsman
Elisa Enriquez, Senior Associate Ombudsman
Evelyn Martinez, Associate Ombudsman

Mailing Address:

Ombuds Office
Los Alamos National Laboratory
P.O. Box 1663, MS M897
Los Alamos, NM 87545

APPENDIX

Ombuds Office Materials

Ombuds Flyer

<http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/assets/docs/ombuds-flyer.pdf>

Ombuds Office Brochure

<http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/assets/docs/brochure.pdf>

Ombuds Presentations List

http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/assets/docs/skills_building.pdf

Resource Library List

http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/assets/docs/resource_library.pdf

Self-help Pamphlets

<http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ethics-audits/ombuds/self-help.shtml>

References

American Bar Association, American Arbitration Association, & Association for Conflict Resolution (2005). Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators. Available from:

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/2011_build/dispute_resolution/model_standards_conduct_april2007.pdf

International Ombudsman Association (2007). Code of Ethics. Available from:

<https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/IOA%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>

International Ombudsman Association (2009). Standards of Practice. Available from:

https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/docs/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf

Declaration of Best Practices for University of California Ombuds Offices

https://staffombuds.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/uc_declaration_best_practices_ombuds_2017.pdf

Additional Web Sites

International Ombudsman Association <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/>

Mediate.com <http://www.mediate.com/>

DOE Alternative Dispute Resolution Office <https://www.energy.gov/oha/services/applications-exceptions/alternative-dispute-resolution>

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Ombuds Services Evaluation and Recommendations

Summer 2017

First Author: Lauren Asher, GRA

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Summary

The goals of this report are to assess Ombuds courses and services and to provide recommendations for improvement. The Ombuds Office's benefits to managers and employees, its ability to further LANL's mission of safety and security, and the role it has in helping the organization become 'conflict capable' are included in the evaluation. The term conflict capable pertains the knowledge and use of interpersonal communication skills and conflict resolution services in support of LANL's mission. Recommendations to help increase the effectiveness of the Ombuds Office at LANL are also provided.

An anonymous and voluntary Service and Course Evaluation questionnaire was developed and handed out at LANL Ombuds classes within a span of seven weeks. Class participants were given a brief explanation of the pre and post class survey – for the evaluation of Ombuds courses and services—with time allocated for responses before and after each class. Overarching research on employee satisfaction and performance, as well as how they relates to conflict management capability, will be presented along with survey results. Other recommendations are based on objective observations of Ombuds classes and services.

B. Rationale

A 2006 study by Hyde “examines the relationship between conflict management in the workplace and self-reported measures of stress, poor general health, exhaustion and sickness absence due to overstrain or fatigue”. The results stated that “conflicts at work have a negative effect on work satisfaction and well-being amongst employees”. According to the study, those who report having dealt with conflict through discussion have a significantly lower likelihood of stress-related health problems and absences than those who either use authority or make no attempt to resolve the problem (Hyde, 2006 p. 2218). Thus, the way conflict is or is not resolved is an important factor in the overall health of employees.

Employees resolve conflicts based on the formal and informal structures in place (Hyde, 2006, p. 2220). How employees deal with conflict is also linked to cultural norms¹ (Tinsley, 2001, p. 360). These factors influence the mental and by extension, physical health of employees. Employees who work for organizations that encourage employee participation in decision making and are perceived as fair, have lower incidences of “psychiatric disorders and depression, better general health, higher levels of organizational commitment and less likely to foster aggressive employee behavior” (Hyde, 2006, p. 2219). If employees feel they are

¹“Norms are standards for how people should behave, which arise from common experiences in social settings” (Tinsley, 2001, p. 361).

being treated in a humane fashion and are given the tools and the space to resolve conflicts, they are more likely to resolve conflict on their own and often times, before conflict escalates. The more employees are able to manage their own conflicts, the more in control they feel of their lives and the more positively they feel about the outcome of events.

The ability to handle conflict is not only linked to workplace culture, but also management style (Hyde, 2006, p. 2223). Top management's attitudes about conflict shape the strategy, thus it is important to highlight that effective communication creates a more robust organization and that their buy-in is essential to the program's success (Waks, 2014, p. 38). Management styles coupled with good conflict resolution strategies and options positively impact working environments. The research suggests that it is extremely beneficial to resolve conflict in a cooperative manner for the overall health of employees and thus the longevity of the business. Training employees in communication and conflict management strategies and informing them of the voluntary and informal conflict resolution services, such as Ombuds, gives them the tools to manage conflict at a lower level - between the individuals themselves. This can have a huge, long-term positive impact on both individual and organizational health.

II. RESULTS

A. Data and Methods

An anonymous and voluntary 10-point Ombuds Office Service and Course Evaluation questionnaire was created and presented during LANL Ombuds courses between June 13 and August 2, 2017. Qualtrics survey software was used to evaluate the survey data. [See Appendix A: LANL Service and Course Evaluation and Appendix B: Qualtrics Report]

Of the 194 questionnaire participants, 42% were aware of Ombuds services but were not clear on what they are, 12% were not aware of Ombuds services at LANL, while 56% were aware of Ombuds services and felt they had a clear understanding of those services. The majority of participants (68%) had never visited the Ombuds Office webpage. When asked if they had ever used Ombuds services and how satisfied they were, a strong majority, 80% had never used Ombuds services, 8% were "very satisfied", 10% were "satisfied", 1% was "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and 2% were "dissatisfied". None were "very dissatisfied". Out of all of the services that LANL Ombuds offers, the options that are least known are 'resource library', 'exploring and clarifying options' and "referring to other programs and policy". The most known services are the 'presentations on conflict and communication skills' and 'facilitating discussions/mediation'. More than half (55%) of participants described their sense of communication skills in conflict as "somewhat confident" followed by neutral (22%) and "somewhat unsure" (11%). When assessing at the level of confidence in handling conflict, half of the respondents felt

confident in their conflict communication abilities - 55% as “very confident” and 8% as “very confident”. Only 1% felt “not very confident” of communication skills while in conflict. If individuals needed assistance with conflict and communication skills in the future, participants stated they would consider ‘attending presentations or workshops’ (21%), ‘receiving coaching to improve communication and conflict resolution skills’ (20%), ‘exploring and clarifying options to resolve a workspace issue’ (19%), ‘resolving a problem in a facilitated discussion or mediation’ (15%), ‘gaining information about other resources and/or policy’ (13%) and ‘checking out materials from the library’ (10%).

The majority of participants had neither used any Ombuds services (79%) nor taken Ombuds courses in the past (59%). Nearly all participants learned “a lot” (44%) or “some” (54%) from the class. Over 50% stated they would “absolutely” take another class, 35% said they were “likely” to take another class, 13% said “maybe” and 1% said it was “not likely” that they would take another class.

With regard to recommendations of classes, workshops, or other resources individual employees would like to see offered, statements made in the comments section of the survey revealed that many respondents did not know what was being offered or requested classes that are currently being offered. This indicates that there are potentially many employees are unaware of Ombuds course offerings. This may be due to a variety of causes including: not having easy and/or consistent online access, not having the time or desire to check upcoming offerings or are unaware that the course listings are available online through UTRAIN. Anecdotally, many newer employees who interacted with the GRE mentioned that they did not know optional, skills-based trainings were available through Utrain and believed that the online registration system was exclusively for mandatory trainings.

Class requests had several themes. Examples of class requests that are, more or less, currently offered in some capacity include: handling team/department conflicts; activities where you ‘grow as a team and overcome obstacles’; team project skills; delegation skills; personality tests; effective emails; management/leadership classes to ‘learn about different communication styles’; ‘do’s and don’ts’ for managers; and general ‘conflict resolution and communication skills’ classes [See Appendix C: Workplace Skills Building Presentations]. Classes that are not offered by Ombuds and that were requested include: presentation skills; education on domestic violence; women in male-dominated fields/areas of the lab; and cultural issues at the Laboratory, including the differences between divisions and how to communicate in a sensitive/classified environment.

B. Implications

LANL has 11,500 total employees with approximately 1,500 Ombuds users annually—those who attend classes, participate in options exploration, coaching, engage in facilitations and use the resource library. All of Ombuds services and courses are voluntary. It may or maybe not be that employees who are already fairly conflict competent and seek to become even better communicators elect to take these classes to hone their skills.

Due to the relatively small percentage of employees who voluntarily choose to attend courses and the small survey sample gathered over seven weeks of Ombuds courses, the results of the data are not representative of the general Laboratory population. The survey results are nonetheless a good starting point for assessing the knowledge of the Ombuds office at LANL and a basis for next steps, moving forward.

Out of 194 questionnaire respondents, 42% did not have a clear understanding of Ombuds services and another 12% lacked any awareness of such services. It is possible to make several general inferences from the data obtained from those who participated in the survey. Based solely on the survey, a large portion of the total LANL population may not know or understand all of the services Ombuds provides. While some LANL employees may indeed know about and understand Ombuds services and do not have an interest in attending classes or coming to the office to receive assistance, there is a potentially large number of LANL employees not benefitting from conflict resolution services and classes who may not be aware of what the Ombuds Office offers. Thus, the LANL community as a whole is not fully benefitting from Ombuds as a resource.

Because the culture at LANL is science based and data driven, numbers and figures may often be perceived as the most important part of the equation. However, the work at the Laboratory is not done by machines but by people—people who need to effectively communicate and manage conflict with each other. People and communication are complicated and messy due to differing styles and worldviews. As individuals in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, we all need skills and the resources to unpack our interactions in order to work effectively (Hampsten, 2016). This is one reason Ombuds services are vital to LANL and its mission.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the survey data, combined with the research discussed in the rationale section, suggest that organizational effectiveness is in a large part determined by the quality and frequency of communication. Factors in organizational effectiveness include workplace culture, the perception of how conflict is handled, management style, and the availability and usage of conflict resolution strategies and services. While Ombuds is a great resource for LANL employees, it appears Ombuds resources may be underutilized relative to its potential to improve overall effectiveness at the Laboratory based on the limited data collected from the survey. Reasons for not using Ombuds services may include lack of knowledge of the existence of Ombuds, lack of understanding of the scope and type of services provided, and/or a lack of institutional memory about Ombuds services. Based on evaluation of the results, relevant research data, and observations made by the GRA during skills building courses, three broad recommendations are offered to build a more conflict capable workplace: 1) ‘Refocus’ Ombuds efforts by highlighting

the organizational-level benefits of conflict capability and Ombuds as a LANL conflict resolution resource 2) ‘Rebrand’ conflict as a normal part of work and life where best practice is to manage and prevent escalation, rather than attempting permanent removal of all conflict 3) ‘Remind’ the LANL community of Ombuds services and course offerings through a variety of methods simultaneously, in conjunction with current outreach initiatives so that the Ombuds office and services are in the forefront of minds. These recommendations are elaborated upon below.

A. Refocus

A highly effective strategy for managing conflicts in organizations is to view the management of conflict in a “proactive approach, linking the success in managing conflict to the achievement of the organization’s key strategic goals and objectives” (Waks, 2014, p. 25). The program must be interwoven in the life of the organization (Waks, 2014, p. 49). This includes support from upper levels. Symptoms of Ineffective communication and poor conflict management can lead to negative consequences such as poor productivity and high turnover. Fortunately, these problems may be mitigated by training and increased awareness. In conclusion, it would be beneficial to put energy and resources into supporting the development of employee communication and conflict resolution skills.

LANL’s institutional goals and values align with building a more conflict capable workplace. Examples of goals that are emboldened by a more conflict capable workforce include LANL goals to drive productivity and innovation, to attract, inspire and develop world-class talent to ensure a vital future workplace, and to position the Laboratory as one of the best places to work. Additionally, LANL’s values may be better supported with more transparent and conflict capable communication. These include ‘serving each other’, ‘engaging with scientific operational and business excellence’, ‘building trust through intellectual honesty’, ‘increasing ethical conduct and individual responsibility’, ‘collaborating to achieve the best solutions’, and ‘ensuring safety and security’.

Lack of effective communication and conflict management may be detrimental to best safety practices. The 2017 LANL DIR-WSST’s Safety and Security Plan (SSIP) includes goals and underlying strategies reflects the concept that building conflict capability through better communication is a way to improve safety and security. The SSIP Goals were created in large part due to the 2016 DIR-WSST VPP results, which had several findings and recommendations around communication. The SSIP includes an overarching goal to ‘improve communication’ with two objectives directly linked to better communication: 1) Leadership - “Where all managers partner with workers to demonstrate the importance of safety and security and communicate consistent priorities and expectations” and 2) Learning from Experience - “Where employees are encouraged by management to offer their ideas for operational improvement and

empowered to make improvements in coordination with management”.

Better communication and conflict management supports LANL’s goals and mission. The more directly involved individuals are in managing their own conflicts 1) the more likely conflicts are to be resolved quickly 2) there is an increased chance that conflicts will be resolved and 3) the more positively the individuals involved will feel about the outcome. In short, the more skills and conflict resolution avenues people have to deal with conflict, the better. The achievement of LANL’s goals and mission rests upon effective communication and thus it is important to highlight communication’s criticality.

A. Rebrand

It is critical to “recognize that managing employment disputes is a legitimate, ongoing task of management - focusing on the cause of conflict - rather than an unexpected and intrusive interruption” (Waks, 2014, p. 27). By rebranding conflict as normal, it becomes easier to engage in discussions about proactive approaches. In addition to ‘normalizing conflict, part of rebranding the meaning of conflict across the organization is to explain conflict prevention as a capability. Rebranding Ombuds services as a skills-based resource and a preventative measure that supports productivity and facilitates an optimally effective work environment can occur through individual conversations as well as at presentations, meetings and other venues.

Explaining, demystifying and providing training on the benefits of preventative conflict management and ‘normalizing’ conflict are three ways to rebrand the way conflict is perceived. Create and support a culture of conflict as ‘normal’ and ‘cyclical’ by engaging in proactive discussions and teaching the importance of conflict resolution at the lowest level, between the individuals having the conflict. Engage in proactive discussions about conflict through skills building decreasing the occurrence of lower-level, interpersonal conflict. Equip individuals with the skills necessary to navigate conflict both individually and within the organizational system (Waks, 2014 p. 31).

By making conflict resolution options accessible, there can be more buy-in. Train leaders on conflict resolution and communication skills. By teaching managers positive communication, conflict resolution and other leadership skills, they can then model such behaviors. Discuss research that shows employees do their best work when they spend less time in conflict, feel more in control of managing their conflict, and are less stressed by their work environment when they have the tools to be conflict capable. Demystify the conflict resolution options available, such as mediation and facilitation. For example, provide information about Ombuds as an option with someone a one-on-one basis after observing a conflict, such as at a meeting or within a group. Clarify what each process is, how the processes are different and how they may be beneficial.

Another approach to rebranding is through general and targeted written materials. Marketing materials should promote Ombuds as a non-escalating resource for conflict resolution with additional unique characteristics. Several recommendations for written marketing materials are outlined below:

- Post flyers in break rooms, on bulletin boards in Craft, Technical, Support and other groups that do not have regular access to a computer. This can increase Ombuds visibility.
 - Specific examples of the types of assistance Ombuds provides
 - Descriptions of what it means to be neutral, confidential, independent, and informal
 - Flyers of upcoming classes
 - Target messages to specific groups that make up the smallest percentage of current Ombuds visitors, such as craft, technical, and student/Post Doc/GRA—based on their interpersonal communication needs, the issues they encounter and what types of skills and classes would be helpful

C. Remind

We are bombarded by a plethora of information every day. It is unrealistic to assume that individuals will consistently remember details about the variety of services available at LANL and their value and benefit. People must be reminded periodically (Waks, 2014, pg. 18). Institutional memory, through frequently and effective communication of ADR policies and procedures is essential to Ombuds success (Waks, 2014, p. 18). There is no ‘silver bullet’ or a best approach that is sure to “stick” in the minds of employees. As stated in Vital Smarts research, it is the use of multiple strategies that is the best strategy. Using more than one avenue multiplies effectiveness—those who used four or more sources of influence in combination - are more likely to influence than those who rely on one single source (Grenny, p. 3). Recommendations listed below are not quick fixes but rather systematic changes that will take time to implement and come to fruition but that will have long-term benefits.

Current opportunities for reminders include class participants of Ombuds services, as attendees are a captive audience. Speak briefly about Ombuds services and other classes before, during and at the end of classes. Many survey respondents relayed that they learned a lot from the class and want to take more. Mentioning upcoming offerings at the end of the class is a good time to speak about future courses and their benefits. People are more likely to sign up for another class after they have attended a class they felt positively about. Another natural and easy opportunity is to remind Ombuds visitors of other services. When visitors come to Ombuds office for support, remind them of the resource library and class offerings. Ombuds also uses More News to remind employees about classes.

Other ideas for reminding the workforce about the Ombuds Office services include sharing information while meeting with managers, at orientations, during meetings with resource groups and at other activities and events. The Ombuds Office should meet with managers once a year or every other year to remind them of current services. This can occur as 1:1 opportunities arise or in 10-15 minute presentation providing information on services.

Ombuds should reinforce the ‘rebranded’ concept of conflict as normal and discuss the work-related benefits of good communication skills. Leaderlinks in another avenue for reminding managers about Ombuds services. Other recommendations based on the GRA summer observations include creating posters about specific classes, having a physical presence at new hire orientations, attending resource group meetings and participating in other activities and events—such as brown bags, ice cream socials, etc. These approaches both increase memory of Ombuds’ services through physical presence as well as creating better understanding of the types of services available.

Another recommendation is to ‘remind’ employees through a communication plan. The communication plan was developed by the summer GRA to be implemented with the assistance of the Communications Office to share stories and information with the LANL community. The plan outlines the use of testimonials, featured stories, emails and other internal communications and is detailed below:

- Testimonials about Ombuds skills building classes
 - Speak to the fact that approximately 20% of employees have benefitted from the classes
 - Specific benefits of the classes (what skills participants learn, what types of situations these skills are useful in etc.)
 - Highlight a specific class: i.e. Crucial Conversations 2-Day Intensive
 - Description of the class
 - Benefits for work output and organizational effectiveness
 - Testimonials from participants
- Featured Stories
 - A brief history of Ombuds Office at LANL
 - Highlight special speakers or events related to conflict resolution
 - Bio of Ombuds staff (“Get to know the Ombuds”)
- Emails/LANL Today/Other internal communication
 - Current Offerings/Trainings/Workshops
 - New trainings/Additional Offerings & Speakers
 - Communication about special events, such as Conflict Resolution Month and the New Mexico ADR symposium

IV. CONCLUSION

The International Institute for Conflict Prevention & Resolution 2014 book, *Cutting Edge Advances in Resolving Workplace Disputes*, states that it is best to have a variety of dispute resolution and management options - both informal and formal - to help support organizational functions. Having options gives employees different paths and entry points and thus makes them more likely to use the beneficial services. Many cutting-edge companies use voluntary alternative dispute resolution procedures to encourage their use and, thus, the availability of non-mandatory, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services like Ombudsmen is an important part of employee support for long-term organizational effectiveness (Waks, 2014, p. 13-14).

Our world is not just about the data and information but also about how we share that information when interacting and communicating with others. Communication is complicated, thus, we need the skills and resources to sort through it to be more effective. A culture at LANL where conflict is seen as a normal part of work, all levels of employees are trained in conflict and communication skills, and where employees know about conflict resolution services make it more likely that a conflict competence workplace is created and a robust organization can be sustained.

“An effective training program supports the development of ‘conflict-competent’ stakeholders throughout the organization. The enhanced abilities of these employees to address conflict will have a ripple effect as they put their skills to work” (Waks, 2014, p. 57).

Effective communication and conflict competence is key to attaining LANL’s goals and furthering its mission of serving our nation. Ombuds classes and other services are an important piece of the puzzle towards working more effectively and creating a more conflict competent and better workplace.

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